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# You Can Shape Policy

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The right (and the obligation!) to advocate is a bedrock value in American democracy. Artists, arts organizations, contributors and audiences all are stakeholders in decisions that are made about public policy. This edition of *The Practical Advocate* offers guidance on how you, as an arts advocate, can use your voice and your passion for the arts to maximum effect.



### Where Do I Start?

The best way to begin advocating is to **introduce yourself to your federal and state elected officials**. Lawmakers need to hear what constituents think, so establish contact (via phone, letter or e-mail) and convey that the arts are important to your community. [Three Simple Ways to Advocate for the Arts](#) provides how-to tips.

**Make the positive impact of your work visible to the public and elected officials.** Are you giving prominent credit for any public funding you receive? Have you put your work on the map by submitting a story to the [United States of Arts](#) website? Do your social media channels emphasize how your programs benefit participants? Get busy and tell your story!

**Get connected** so you'll know when key votes or actions are pending. Plug in to your [state arts agency's](#) mailing list and social media channels and become a member of your state's citizen advocacy organization.

### Do...

- **Share the facts.** Empower your case with research on the impact of government arts funding.
- **Be creative.** More than most advocates, the arts community has the skills to humanize policy issues and help people understand the importance of our cause.
- **Be positive.** It's more effective to start advocating for an issue rather than against a position. When there is a specific bill that requires action, you can express opposition to or support for that legislation.

### Don't...

- **Don't vilify.** Attacking anyone's political, social or religious beliefs will not convert them to your point of view or make them feel proud to support your cause. Cultivating "pan-partisan" support is the best way to grow public funding for the arts.
- **Don't allow yourself to be baited.** Check with a reliable source (like your [state arts agency](#)) to learn the facts if you hear an alarming story.
- **Don't get discouraged.** Your voice matters! There is nothing that captures the attention of an elected official more than contact from a local constituent. Use that power strategically.

### Cite the Evidence

[Five Essential Arts Arguments](#)

[Fact vs. Fiction: Government Arts Funding](#)

[Why Should Government Support the Arts?](#)

NASAA is the membership organization serving America's state and jurisdictional arts agencies. We are a national, not-for-profit, nonpartisan association that provides research, advocacy, training and networking for state arts agencies and their constituents. Our work is evidence-driven and grounded in the principles that the arts are essential to a thriving democracy and that the public, private and nonprofit sectors all have vital roles to play in American success. To learn more, visit [www.nasaa-arts.org](http://www.nasaa-arts.org). Photo by Tristin Heap, courtesy of Artists For Humanity, afhboston.org.

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